

# Lesley Battler | Journal | 2000-2001





## Journal archive project

### Introduction

As a young reader i was fascinated by diaries, journals, notebooks of all kinds. Perhaps part of that attraction was that they seemed a way of telling your own story, remaking the world as you went on. “They” never have the final say in your journal.

I grew up in a family that was shattered by mental illness and writing in a journal was a discipline and a way of keeping myself together; proof I could build an independent life. I was never big on recording my most intimate feelings or expressing myself. For me, the journal existed to help me let go and move beyond the emotional, interior world. I was so much more interested in recording the flora and fauna of the mundane. Daily life was exotic to me.

From the 1980s and on into the Naughts, I wrote in a journal, which I eventually transcribed into electronic format as a project to keep me occupied during the Covid-19 pandemic lockdown. At first it felt like a self-indulgent pastime, certainly a little irrelevant considering world-events, but as I continued I started feeling maybe there was some value to the project. I decided to preserve them as archives, format them as PDFs and release them onto the Internet where anyone can search, download and use any of the material for projects of their own.

To me, this journal is really an archive, portrait of an era as seen by one insignificant person. It's the insignificance that is truly key here. I love the archives and records of the invisible lives that accumulate into social zeitgeists. Being a journal, it's hit-and-miss what I wrote about, or had time to write about. Huge chunks of my life never made it to the page while there may be hundreds of words devoted to a movie I enjoyed on a hot summer night. I have not added any narrative arc or changed names to keep the journal as intact as possible.

In such a long time span the journal volumes reveal a generation trying to find their way in the world; me and so many of my friends and acquaintances working contract jobs, going to community colleges to learn vocational skills. Spoiler alert: societal change, turbulence, employment issues, generational conflict were just as strong then as they are now. While transcribing the journals I also became fascinated by the rhythm of daily life, how periods of calm so often erupt into times of intense change.

I have taken the original journals and reformatted them into chronological years that begin in January and end in December, and I have included a synopsis with each one to provide a little context. I preserved as much as possible the style and quirks of the original handwritten journals and only employed some light editing to correct place names, and obvious mis-spellings.

These volumes are meant for anyone who is interested in the 1980s and 1990s, in archives, in the lives of young people trying to find a place in the world, in personal impressions of socio-economic-cultural events. This, of course, includes the introduction of the Internet to our daily lives. Please feel free to browse, reuse, recycle any of this material for your own projects. After all this time I still believe information wants to be free.

## **Vol. 21, 2001-2002**

Exploring the secret world of offices – Gelbviehs vs Blond d’Acquitaines – Folk Festival boot camp – I leave CPR – I begin a manuscript about the CPR – Trip to Punta Cana – Disorienting night bus rides – Compounds, security, numbered bracelets – *The Prisoner* TV show – Caught with paperweights at Customs – Historical research trip to Montréal – I start truly imagining the city in the late 1800s – My last CPR wake.

**April 25-26**

So many secret worlds in office buildings. I helped Fred deliver bouquets of tulips to offices as part of the Breath of Spring flower campaign for the Alberta Lung Association. I was able to enter all kinds of offices, mostly small to mid-sized oil companies tucked away inside buildings I've never noticed before. The deeper into downtown the glossier the office. Aquarium shades of blue, green, pink. Washes of colour. Lobbies and reception areas like hotels with trade magazines and newspapers artfully arranged on the table, some kind of artwork on the walls, mostly sumptuous and oddly nostalgic photos of oil rigs, derricks, etc.

It usually takes about thirty seconds to figure out what kind of company is hidden behind the reception area. The exception was a small publishing company. We walked in with our box of tulips. The receptionist greeted us, turned over the money collected from the employees who participated. I glanced around but could not pick up a clue to what they publish. No samples in the waiting area, awards, testimonials, no photos of employees or artifacts of oil rigs or horses or planes, trains, automobiles. No logo. Even Nancy Drew would be stumped.

We delivered flowers to a lot of barrister and solicitor offices. Generally tasteful and upscale, genuine oil paintings on the walls, glossy wood veneers. One law firm added a photo of the lawyers in wigs and gowns. Although we didn't have any trouble with lawyers today, Fred said last time he delivered poinsettias for the ALA, the lawyers would nickel-and-dime him or wouldn't pay if the receptionist wasn't there. I can't get over how people who make so much money, tenured in such privileged positions will stiff a charitable organization.

Corridors, doorways, bridges, elevators, stairs, back exits, inner courtyards, atriums, secret cafés. Interesting how much difference lighting makes, how within seconds you can tell if you could stand working in a particular office. Natural light vs fluorescents, a smell. One office, some kind of oil and gas research outfit, I think, was oppressive. Clutter everywhere, paperwork flooding out the offices, cardboard boxes lining the small corridor. We also delivered tulips to the industrial areas in the northeast. Drab buildings with names like the Airway Business Centre. They also have their secret lives. A honeycomb of office suites. Some emulated larger companies, saw a lot of framed motivational slogans such as, Success or Aspiration. A lot of naugahyde and truly flammable-looking cubicle partitions.

Delivered to the Canadian Gelbvieh Association, located in the Stockman's Building and yes, a gelbvieh is a breed of cow. The walls were adorned with framed photos of gelbviehs. On the table, a stack of breeding and genetics magazines. Tucked in beside the Gelbvieh Association was the Blond d'Acquitaine Association. I imagined livestock espionage between the two. This association was even smaller, a large storage closet covered by a Venetian blind. Someone hunched in the corner with a calculator, barely visible through the slats.

We entered an anonymous office called Everard & Co. The reception area had a magazine rack that contained the usual *Macleans* and various business magazines. But *People* was prominently displayed. I glanced at some paperwork lying on the counter and discovered Everard & Co does skip-tracing. They were in the process of sending a letter asking for someone's help in locating a man.

## **May 5**

Herland: Feminist Film and Video Celebration.

*Dollhouse Diaries* by Staeson Rae. A recitation of words in alphabetical order. A list evoking childhood in a particular time, place and culture, e.g, Jughead, Krazy Karpel, Little Lotta, Mad Magazine, Millie the Model, Mr Dressup, Nancy Drew. A dozen words beginning with snow. A really evocative accumulation. This list of words was interspersed with images of a dollhouse.

Especially liked the image of a black cat towering over the house, peering into its open rooms. Also home movie footage. I enjoyed some of the Alberta references, which made me think about the global and regional popular culture, e.g, Flintstones, Fort MacLeod.

*Marshlands*, Penny McCann, 2000.

Short video featuring a train. A psychic predicts the narrator will be hit by a train between the ages of forty and fifty. Elegiac look at the marshes of Sackville, NB. Memory meets uncertain future. Telephone lines, traffic, trains, bleak sky and ghostly swish of motion reminded me of the Autobahn, the dissolution of East Germany in 1991. A territory where freedom meets fear of the unknown.

*Debtor's Prison*, Simone Moir, 1999.

Students protesting rising tuition fees and Big Banking. I've seen a few of these World Trade videos and am impressed by how well they've co-opted the techniques of mass media and advertising. Use of assemblage, quick cuts, camera angles that put you in the middle of the action, even adding a vertiginous effect. Use of costume, spectacle, icon as well as mockery. I certainly enjoyed seeing the Capitalist Pig enter through the revolving doors of the CIBC.

*Singing Grace*, Seema Goel, 2000.

Delicious sensuality of mud/clay letters inscribed on flesh. Deeply arousing.

*A Time of Love and War*, Sabrina Mathews, 2000.

This was the feature at fifty minutes. Sabrina, a Canadian artist, is inspired by the Sandinista revolution to visit Nicaragua. Marta is a Nicaraguan who joins the Sandinista movement. They maintain a friendship across three continents, over a decade and time, place and events in the film are related through their correspondence. What I really enjoyed about the film was the sense of place, the tactility. The film conveys Nicaragua, Montréal, Moscow at street level, the buildings, markets, peeling paint, signs in windows, a line-up in a Moscow grocery store that doesn't focus on a couple of destitute babushkas. Young people calling for a future, the pots people use in Moscow to gather their groceries, the abacuses used in some shops as part of the daily transaction.

We see the aerogrammes Marta sent from Moscow, and we see Sabrina gluing American bulls under postcards to send to Marta. We are taken to the streets of Nicaragua, the alleys of rue Villeneuve. For me the film's impact comes through these details. We are all people, these are the streets, the neighbourhoods, the routine gestures and activities, the ways we all adapt to circumstances, the little systems and transactions we invent. The people we see every day who become part of our lives. A sense of what it might be like to be these two women living in these places in a particular time. "The small bodies," as Foucault might say.

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To keep from falling into a pit of despair over ruining my life by relocating with Canadian Psychotic Railway, I took a novel-writing course with Aritha van Herk at University of Calgary. I loved the course and my classmates and I have come out of it with the beginning of a real novel. Her final evaluation blew me away.

"Lesley, I always wonder whether I state clearly enough what an extraordinarily talented writer you are. Watching your progress this year, and yes, it was progress, however much you thought you were spinning your wheels, was phenomenal. You are amazingly gifted; you must continue to write, you must, you must, you must. You have an ability that is beyond the reach of most writers; truly astounding. Don't deny those gifts or you will resent yourself forever.

"Vagabondage' is compelling, well written, beautifully paced and utterly engaging. The characters' longing for Montréal, her picaresque drive/flight do inherently make a wonderful road/railway binary that is structurally perfect. The revised narrative is so good that I was furious that you hadn't written 300 pages and finished the story for me; you better do that or I will visit you with all kinds of threatening implements. I have nothing to suggest. Your re-write incorporated all our comments, and I read it without stopping, with complete attention and delight. The virginal parts were hair-raising. Montreal was a city of dreams. The Balmoral Station was a tottering castle of ghosts. Calgary and the Palliser were terrifying. My killer began to make sense.

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“Your written critiques were outstanding, generous, thorough, astute and absolutely spot on in what they apprehended in each piece. Your critical ability is as astonishing as your writerly ability, and it showed in every one of your written critiques.

“Now I am going to go out on an oak branch and since I know you are far enough away not to hit me, suggest something. Have you ever thought of doing a PhD? You could do one here part-time, you could write a novel as your dissertation and you would be an extraordinary doctor of readings. Think about it.

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“I am going to say this again. You have the ability to be an absolutely great writer. Write. You must.”

And a scrawled note in ink: “PS Get your folk fest tickets! We’re going!”

## **May 19-20**

Interesting weekend. Fred was up north again with Promet. I decided to ramble along 17<sup>th</sup> Ave and pick up a folk festival pass while I was at it. I really need to complete a start-to-finish draft of “Vagabondage” because the impetus for writing it will vanish when I leave this place, find a new job and the railway will be a distant memory. I can’t believe no one has tackled the CPR on a fictional level before. Can I be this lucky? But this is the most difficult piece of work I have ever tackled; ten times worse than the thesis.

Drastic change in weather. It just turned on me. The wind picked up and the sky to the east was a deathly grey-brown. My eyes were fragged with dust and I didn’t notice Brian Stanko, parked right beside me. Pleasant and courteous as ever, he drove me down to Megatunes where I picked up my folk fest tickets. We browsed through Megatunes, then met up with a friend of his and the three of us poked around Books And Books, also known as Andrew Wedderburn’s bookstore. Sure enough, Andrew was working there today. Stopped for bagels and lox and Starbucks and we even browsed through Blockbuster. I felt like a Seinfeld character, hanging out in the city, meeting up with the usual suspects, indulging in repartee. Brian is great at repartee.

Started snowing at Blockbuster. It has been so dry, most of the province is suffering a drought. It's as if the weather has to go into convulsions before it can release the slightest precipitation. As for my garden, another disaster this year. A rabbit has eaten everything that might have survived the drought. Not only do I see the White Rabbit but he has taken up residence in my garden. His bed is at the side of the house. He obviously doesn't care that he's a symbolism bucket.

I returned to the house and a message from Steve O'Connor inviting me to a party at his house tonight. Drove to Steve's with Jennifer and Mary Helen. It was a very weird evening. The party consisted of Steve, Dave Lockwood, the three of us, the new guy at BIS and his partner. Classic rock blasting, the same kind he blasted in the mail room. We all drank too much beer. I've never seen Jennifer drink so much. Steve hustled the kids out of the room and passed a joint around. Dave Lockwood and Jennifer started mixing it up, something very intense happening between them.

Meanwhile Steve kept hitting on Mary Helen and me. Four o'clock rolled around. Mary Helen and I were hellbent on leaving in a cab. Steve kept insisting we stay. By the time the taxi arrived Jen and Dave L were still in the basement, lights off, door closed. Mary Helen came back to my house and stayed the night. We spent a long, leisurely afternoon together, which was far and away the best part of this fiasco. We drank coffee and analyzed the evening as we are wont to do. Walked down to Perkins to find something easy on our stomachs. It was a little like having an out-of-town visitor.

It was also good to talk because the evening left a bad taste in my mouth, above and beyond the hangover. We talked about how gross Steve was, but we were more concerned about Jennifer. We're both worried that Dave Lockwood will just suck her under. We wish she'd find someone younger, less set in his ways and more educated. Jen is so young and sheltered compared to him. She is also wonderfully complex and needs a partner with more interests. We're also very certain they don't even come close to wanting the same things in life, such as children.

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Working on the manuscript in the Grad Lounge. A man who comes in to play pool came over to greet me. He thinks what I'm doing is really cool. When he found out my ms is about the CPR he started telling me some of his own train stories, how he remembered steam trains in Vernon before the coming of diesel. I started writing notes as soon as he left the room.

Continued working. A burly man, salt-and-pepper beard, curly hair, ruddy face was speaking to a younger woman in a suit at the bar. I couldn't make out a word she was saying but I could hear him talking about the CPR. He sounded pretty pissed off. I wondered if I was hearing things, the ms was causing me to hear CPR and railway references everywhere, my mind stuck on one channel. Then I heard, "Look at this. This came out of their own communications department. This is excellent work. It seemed as if they were actually interested in the railroad. I don't know what happened." I had to look. I got up to go the bathroom, passing the bar. Spread out on the counter was a copy of "Lesley's Excellent Adventures."

## **July 26-29**

Folk festival with Aritha, Miriam Grant and Miriam's partner, Del. The whole experience is like a four-day vacation – at Boot Camp. Day One: Left work early and arrived at Prince's Island around 3:30. Easily spotted Miriam in line at the bend in the red road. A line formed steadily behind her, people appearing, joining like pieces of a magnetic puzzle. Miriam has just returned from Zimbabwe, where she is doing research. She loved it and even stayed a night in a castle. The people I meet here in Calgary are so interesting.

Del was the next to join us. She and Miriam are partners. Del is crazy about Miriam, seems to be the nurturing homebody in the relationship, the one who wants to be identified as part of this couple. She was the one who told me they are partners. Meanwhile, Miriam was extremely anxious for Aritha to arrive.

Aritha eventually came steaming down the path, carrying a large tarp and two tiny beach chairs. As the day went on, Del spoke to me a lot about Miriam, Miriam spoke to me a lot about Aritha. Aritha then told me that Del wasn't really into the folk festival; she just wanted to come along. "She's afraid I'll take Miriam away from her."

Gates opened to the line, which snaked around Prince's Island. Time for the tarp run. One person carries the stuff. Another takes the tarp and runs through the grounds, past the concession booths and tents and stakes a place on the field in front of the main stage. Everyone does this and it's like the annual grunion run. Within seconds the island was covered in tarps, a sea of blue. They staked their tarps into the ground, planting poles, walking sticks, tent and ski poles as if marking their homesteads. These were topped with flags, rubber chickens, Kraft Dinner boxes, etc, to identify the sites. And the costumes! Baseball caps, gauzy scarves, Safari vests, tie-dyed blouses, skirts, jackets. Young women dancing barefoot, waving streamers. Glitter hair and makeup, little clumpy pigtails dyed blue, fuchsia, purple. Lots and lots of piercings.

Thursday line-up on the main stage. Ongo Trogode truly wondrous. A procession of musicians wound their way down the path barefoot, wearing nothing but grass skirts, adorned with necklaces and anklets. They looked tired as if they had just followed a songline across the desert. The musicians played Ongo horns, drums, wooden whistles (ngala) and smaller horns made of antelope antler. A polyphonic sound worthy of Steve Reich or Philip Glass. I was thrilled, sitting on a patch of grass by a red gravel path while another world moves in on me. The walnut-coloured bodies of the musicians, the instruments hewn of wood, kept together with duct tape, the concentration of the leader. Not something I ever expected to see in Calgary.

Later, David Byrne on the main stage. He played many of my favourite Talking Heads music including "Once in a Lifetime," which has become my Calgary theme song. His quirkiness and irony are even more pleasurable in person. Aritha, Miriam and Del left but I stayed for the two encores as this was the first time I've seen him live. He's been frozen in my memory as a waif-like man with dark intense eyes. Now he looks like a model from a J Peterman catalogue.

## Day 2

The Be Good Tanyas started the evening off. Three young women from Vancouver who play traditional Appalachian folk music. N'Java, from Madagascar, was an amazing group. Hypnotic, lyrical with the kind of rhythm that could go on all night. Oysterband from England also outstanding. Accordions, fiddle, guitar, drums and cello, all played with sheer hellhound-on-my-trail intensity. The Cowboy Junkies brought a lot of gravitas to the festival. By the time they took the stage, Prince's Island was a sea of people, six deep on every embankment. The island was full of squatters' camps, colourful town squares. I have to admit I found the Junkies a little boring compared to some of the bands I have never heard before.

At that point we were all ready to adjourn to the beer tent but the line-up was unsurpassable and we left the grounds to find a bite to eat in Eau Claire. Aritha kept donning Miriam's red baseball cap to go incognito. Even so, she kept running into students and former students. It felt odd leaving the grounds and entering Eau Claire; it felt so much like I was far away from Calgary. The condos circled in a surreal way. We went to Brewsters. Somehow the talk turned to me doing a PhD.

This has turned into something of a saga. Aritha brought it up in my evaluation. When I asked her about it she seemed to be doing everything in her power to discourage me. She is contrary but even so, I was a little put out. Some recruitment. Tonight she was still quite negative, said the department was full of assholes and dominated by Renaissance scholars, full of people jealous of her and the Creative Writing program's success. To me, this all sounds pretty much like business as usual. It was exactly the same at Concordia. Most assholes are quite easy to predict. It's the decent people with sublimated envy and ambitions, who cause the most harm. (Barb Kuester, Lynne Murphy, anyone?)

Miriam, who is associate dean of graduate studies, was extremely encouraging, however. "Do it," she said. "I think you should." Her eyes twinkled. I thought so from the beginning, when we were in 496 together.

Aritha said, "You are so smart."

After Aritha went to the washroom I said to Miriam, "I'm not that worried about assholes. I've dealt with a few over the years."

“I’ll bet,” she said.

“Basically, they’re all the same everywhere.”

She nodded. “Exactly. I really do think you should do it.”

She has her PhD in Geography from Queen’s.

Aritha insisted on driving me home so I got to ride in the mythical Porsche. Along the Macleod Trail she treated me to the history of Macleod and why this horrible strip is named after him.

### Day 3

Took the morning line-up shift, arriving at six a.m. People were already in line, cocooned in sleeping bags, lounging in tiny chairs. There is a whole protocol and camaraderie to being in line at the Folk Fest. A lovely woman beside me lent me one of her chairs. She was finishing Margaret Atwood’s new book, so we hunkered down in the chill and read, no obligation to keep up any kind of chit-chat. A message moved through the line like a telegraph signal. “The Good Earth at Eau Claire is open.”

Aritha arrived with the chairs and tarp. We both went to Eau Claire for latte and bagels. The entire line at the Good Earth consisted of early folk festers. You could tell by the “Saturday” tyvek strips wrapped around our wrists like hospital bracelets. When the gates opened, everyone hastily packed everything away into backpacks, flight bags, wheeled suitcases and stood poised, flexing in preparation for the tarp run. Aritha did it this time, to ensure we got the right spot this time; left side, close but not too close to the speaker. I guess I didn’t get it right yesterday.

I especially enjoyed the workshops. Five stages scattered through the park provided a more intimate setting with musicians grouped according to styles in jams and round-robins. Some interesting juxtapositions at times. The Be Good Tanyas melded well with members of Scruj MacDukh. Miriam hated the combination of N’java and Wimme. I thought they went bizarrely well. N’java’s sustained rhythms half-melded and half-jarred with Wimme’s Finnish “electro-yoiking.” The visual aspect was really dissonant. A very white guy in a pseudo-Finnish costume alongside colourful performers from Madagascar. No stage rapport between them, no hint either could ever influence the other.

We left during Eliza Carthy's set, maybe because I was really fatigued. Aritha insisted on driving me home although I told her I intended to go to the nearby Sheraton and grab a taxi. But I do love a ride in the Porsche, and Aritha's a good driver. Tonight, steering through the downtown one-ways to the MacLeod Trail she asked again about Fred. This time I was honest about how rocky the relationship has felt since he moved to Calgary. I then tried to explain why I deflect talk about my relationship with Fred. It seems to be in so much flux I don't even know what to say about it. I could tell her right now it was solid and tomorrow I would be ready for divorce court. Just as I suspected, Aritha really did understand. "You don't want to be pinned down," she said. "We are so much alike."

#### Day 4

Miriam did early line duty this morning, topping me by arriving at 5:20. Excellent workshop stages today. Caught "Singularly Obsessed" with Christine Fellowes, the Handsome Family and Big Sandy and the Fly-Right Boys. That was a nice blend. At noon I joined Miriam and Del for "Africa Never Stands Still, featuring N'java and Boubaar Tarore. This was wonderful.

The sky darkened. Night does come, even in Calgary. Buckwheat Zydeco the last performers. Soul and funk in Creole tradition. Buckwheat exhorted everyone to stand up and dance and when they started playing the tarps turned into dance floors and all around me was rhythm and motion and I forgot where I was and joined in until overwhelmed by the pure sheer rush of moving my body. Miriam, fatigued by her early shift, left early. Del lingered, which made me very happy, as I had expected her to leave with Miriam.

Aritha rolled up the tarp and continued dancing with me on the grass. I looked around in disbelief. Here I am, still in Calgary, dancing with Aritha van Herk. She kept on with me, dance after dance, not showing one sign of fatigue or loss of enthusiasm, hopping, jumping, waving her arms, her face glowing. We kept on going through the two encore songs. It was one of my best moments in Calgary.

We then joined the exodus from Prince's Island, an orderly flood of people leaving the grounds, crossing the bridge like evacuees, carrying their tarps, chairs, totems, as if bearing their worldly possessions. I helped Aritha carry one of her chairs to her Porsche. We kissed and she told me to call her. I nipped over to the hotel to catch a taxi. It was truly as if I were returning to Calgary after being far away.

[Journal suspended until 2002. I leave CPR and start writing a novel about the CPR.]

### **March 2, 2002**

Fred's mother decided to take her role as family matriarch seriously and arranged for a family reunion in Punta Cana, Dominican Republic. Fred and I began the journey today. First stop, the Terrace B&B in Toronto. Lovely, in the Casa Loma area. I wandered around and feasted on turrets gables, leaded windows, staircases. Alcoves, wooden beams and brick. I do love Toronto. Spring has already started here. Smells: vegetation, sewage, earth, damp. Grass starting to green, even some tiny flowers.

- Breakfast with a couple from England and a group from Québec City.
- Musty smell in our attic room, exactly like my old room in Elrond. I never realized that smell was actually must until I moved to Calgary.
- All night public transit. Sigh.
- Profusion of sights and sound on Queen W. Store with live models in windows, musty book/CD/junk shops, markets, sex shops, Goth and bondage boutiques.
- Sign on driving school car: "Unique Drivers of Canada."
- No more punks across from the Peter Pan restaurant.
- What have they done with the outpatients from the Mental Health or Addiction Centre far along Queen W? It also seems as if panhandlers have been driven out of the area.



- Man sleeping on a sodden maroon couch outside a Greek taverna.
- On Victoria, near Church, a Black man with dreadlocks lying in a sleeping bag, head at the curb near the stop sign so people had to step over him to cross the street.
- Old hard-core lounge across from a funeral parlour.

I have seen the building where I want to work and it is 401 Richmond, a wonderful old building in the heart of downtown with a great story behind it. It was built in 1899, home of Canada's first manufacturing plant for printing directly on tin cans. The Zeidler family bought it in 1994 when the building was on the skids with high vacancy rates, frequent break-ins. Run-down and bankrupt. Margaret Zeidler, a graduate in Architecture, saw the possibilities. She widened the halls, created open spaces, persuaded tenants to install windows that could open into hallways and glass doors to develop a sense of community. The building is made of brick walls, hewn timbers and a gorgeous interior courtyard.

It was like walking through Middelburg, a dreamy timeless wander up and down corridors looking at brick walls and wooden beams. A hatter's shop on the corner, an art gallery, graphics arts companies, clothing designers, magazine publishers, film-makers, dotcoms. While roaming down one of the alleys two cats prowled past us. The only thing missing were the bats and swallows.

Raining by the time we left. Before turning in at the B&B I decided to enjoy a rare pleasure – a walk in the rain. I was out later than I thought I'd be, and was convinced Fred had the key to the B&B. I crossed the street to the Toronto Rehab Centre to use the phone there and call Fred on his cell. The security guard, an elderly man with a Boer War moustache, was anxious about letting me use the phone, said his job was on the line. Turned out it's long-distance to reach Fred's cell, so I couldn't call from there. I thanked the man profusely. He was doing me a kindness. Still pleasant out and I walked up to Casa Loma to see if it had a pay phone. Nope. The rain increased. Some kind of private function was going on, parking lot was full of limos and very expensive cars.

Returned to the B&B, resolved there was no choice but to disturb the household. Rain and wind picked up. I rang the doorbell. No response. I pressed harder. Nothing. I couldn't even see a light inside. I banged the mail slot, hoping Fred would hear the sound and think of me. No response. I walked to the side of the house, jumped up and down under the window I thought was our room. Nada. It was becoming downright Gothic. Rain, wind, water running down the streets, dark ravines. And yes, castle towers and turrets. Like a good old-fashioned Victorian heroine I wrapped my cloak around me and fled down a trail through the ravine, down to Davenport to a Country Style Donuts with a pay phone. Finally got through to Fred who informed me that I had been carrying the key the whole time.

#### **March 4**

After one of Suzanne Charbonneau's lavish breakfasts, we boarded a Transat, along with at least three hundred other tourists, all heading for Punta Cana. People were crammed into tiny seats and it was like being part of a cargo shipment. The time passed somehow and about half-hour before descent, all was murky. No lights or grid. Only a few strings of lights shaped like constellations appeared out the window. We stepped down from the plane to the tarmac as if disembarking a private jet, then lined up to present passports and the green dictator forms we had to fill out while at Pearson.

The Dominican Republic airport reminded me of a chapel with its steeply pitched roof, but the doors are all open to the wind and the palm leaves sounded metallic in the wind, just like a creaking awning. Complete disorientation as the tourist cargo was divided, according to resort, and loaded onto buses.

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The whole evening reminded me of *The Prisoner*, the British spy show starring Patrick McGoochan, in which a secret agent is stripped of his identity, given a number and consigned to a surreal compound that vaguely resembles a European walled town. On the surface the town is familiar enough to make it really hurt when nothing is quite right and the most familiar things turn out to be fake. Details that should trigger memory, or a sense of home, don't and can't, because they are simulations and designed to disorient you and keep you distracted from what you've lost.

Fred and I boarded the tourist bus and took the back seats. No idea where we were going; just driven. The bus careened down streets we couldn't see, turned corners and as soon as I started to notice things out the window, a "tour guide" began a distracting spiel. I could detect the shapes of palms, palmettos, an undergrowth only hinted at in Florida. Images flashed by; a hut, tiny cube-shaped houses, a cantina so open I could glimpse the counter and glasses. Meanwhile the bus continued careening down potholed roads. Coincidentally enough, as soon as we passed the settlements, the bus lights went off, the "tour guide" shut up. Eventually the bus turned down a long curved road until it reached the beach resort area. Our resort was called Le Grand Paradiso Bavaro.

We entered the reception area to check in. Hacienda-style, cool minimal planes painted papaya red. The resort is a compound consisting of colour-coded buildings painted in tropical shades of blue, lemon, lime, pink. Pleasing to the eye and very photogenic yet strangely generic. This is a completely fake community. Apartments that aren't really apartments. A city of people who completely ignore each other. Unlike the people you meet in Banff or even Fish Creek Park, no one says hello. *The Prisoner* analogy continued. When we checked in we were assigned numbers and wristbands, which we had to wear for the entire time. I was 4634. "I am not a number, I am a human being!"

Met up with Fred's family and got settled in our room, as settled as one can be in a tropical-coloured compound where a security guard is posted on every corner. You can't go anywhere, can't even prowl between buildings without the presence of security guards. The room itself was pleasant, just like a room at the Best Western only with toilet paper swans and beautifully rolled towels.

## March 5

To the beach, where else? Beautiful, of course, but as artificial as the resort itself. White sand, exquisite on the feet, obviously raked a million times a day. Blue and white beach lounge chairs arranged in rows along the beach, tastefully signifying the blue ocean and white sand. Gorgeous waves of aqua-sapphire-turquoise-indigo. It's impossible not to notice the ceaseless machinations that keep Paradise in place. Small brown-skinned men, speaking Spanish, move like automatons, arranging chairs, picking up garbage, incessantly cleaning tables, sweeping floors, etc etc. Seems as if there are ten employees for every tourist. This makes it easy not to notice the feral dogs on the beach. These are gentle, patient dogs with visible ribs that made my heart ache. They curl up in sand beds and emerge for tidbits from the tourists. They seem to be tolerated, here at least, a resort that has only been open for a month. I hope they don't turn against the dogs.

Left the compound and walked the road parallel the beach. I've heard this whole area is slated for development of more tourist condos. Now it's caught between natural and developed. I can glimpse a bit of the countryside without threat, while still wearing my tourist bracelet and protected by security. Right outside the barbed wire fence are a couple of shacks with chickens, open fires, cooking pots, a woman moving between house and barn, balancing gourds on her head.

Walked on until I came to the flea market, which seemed to be a tourist attraction for all the resorts along the beach. A man, nattily dressed in white polo shirt, black pants, ran up to me. "Hola lady. Come and look" I was in beach clothes, had no money on me and I told him so. "Doesn't cost any money to look." They obviously depend on the first look and the return visit after that look. I followed him up to his booth, feet burrowing into increasingly dense sand, to his booth where he tried to place a necklace around my neck. He lost interest in me quickly after I gave it back to him.

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My next walk was along the beach on the other side of the compound, where I found a trail up the dunes leading into the woods. I kept running afoul of the bureaucracy because I found it impossible to stay inside the boundaries. I love to walk, to roam around a place and see it as intimately as possible. This is exactly what I am not supposed to do here.

Continued feeling like Number 6, surrounded by people but generic people. All these languages and nationalities but nowhere near the cosmopolitan feeling at Suzanne Charbonneau's breakfast table.

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Late at night I went running out to the beach, sat down on a lawn chair to take in the beauty. I was stunned by how few people were out. All the tourists, which must have numbered in the hundreds, had disappeared. I found out why. Within seconds I was joined by two security guards who sat in chairs on both sides of me until I decided to call it a night.

### **March 6**

Walk along the dunes into palm forest. Only one police buggy passed me, only one helicopter hovering overhead. A quiet day for me. Just beyond the security posts and barbed wire fencing is a long winding white sand road leading to a farm with chickens. The farmhouse is a shack constructed from found material, bits of wood, palm bark, leaves, trash that is tossed aside everywhere outside the compound itself. A woman in an old blouse, skirt, headscarf all in mismatched patterns, moved routinely between house and barn. The barn door was covered with a faded beach towel. A small girl, beautifully dressed, hair in two neat pigtails tossed a stick around like a baton.

Every day they face this resort and I wondered if they feel as if they're on display, their lives a tourist attraction. I wanted to take a picture but felt too uncomfortable. The little girl watched me aim the camera, but I couldn't press the shutter. I can understand the concept of photography stealing the soul. It felt as if I would be taking something from them and not giving anything back. I continued down the road up and away from the beach. A barbed wire fence separated the tourist lands from the scrub full of palmettos, piles of coconut shells, trash heaps. Litter everywhere, in every single nook and cranny. Another shack that looked like a lean-to with a table and chair, cooking pot and a well-dressed boy scuffling around.

Then I circled back to the flea market. As soon as I approached the vendors called out, “Hola, lady. Frank Cheapie-Cheap.” This time I could see the back of the flea market, tarpaulins flapping in the wind, merchants to-and-froing from Ford Explorers, men peeing on palm trees. Fascinating to watch the dynamics between the tourists and the little feral dogs. There were two when I first sat down, now there are five. A nomadic colony. It’s fascinating to see who feeds them, who ignores them, who goes to the buffet to bring them something, who clucks disapprovingly at their presence and tries to drive them away. I could not predict who would do what.

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Morning boat cruise and snorkelling. I couldn’t really call it a cruise; it was more like we were slammed over the waves in a motorboat. The snorkelling was lovely. Bobbing, floating safe in a life jacket, feeling the waves pick me up, bear me off and place me somewhere I have never seen, gazing into a new universe of coral reefs, colourful fish. All the silent motion around me. Then back into the motorboat for the rocky return.

Fred’s brother Bob and I were both pretty hungover. Bob, his partner Kathy and I had stayed up late drinking “blanco” (Kathy and me) and Triple Sec (Bob). Had a good, interesting talk with them about the family. The whole thing started when Bob and I talked about work and he suddenly told me he was upset and didn’t understand the rift between him and Fred. I discovered that Bob identifies with his father, while I know Fred detests his father and identifies with his mother. In fact, Bob and Kathy came close to charging Marria with child abuse.

Kathy and I talked as well, comparing notes about the old days, our very similar introductions and experiences with the family. The talk confirmed a couple of things to me, things I had suspected but didn’t know because I’ve seen so little of them, especially since moving to Calgary. Bob has deep feelings and takes his father’s side in the divorce. Kathy isn’t as frigid or snobbish as I had thought.

She has employed exactly the same strategy I have in dealing with the family. Not revealing herself, keeping a wary distance, etc etc. This came as a surprise as I had always believed that Kathy was the favourite, the golden girl from a respectable business background who always did all the right things, whom I could never live up to. Not so. Kathy gets the same business I do; mocked because she came from a small town in Canada, was a Sociology major, wouldn't call Marria "Mom." She had it worse, as it turns out, as Oma didn't like her.

Bob apologized for not supporting me at the beginning. He even told me he had complained about Fred and me to Oma. Oma told him to leave us alone. "They will be just fine," she said. "They have a *bond* between them." Kathy described how awful the first meeting went between her and Oma. I kept quiet about Oma, who told me she loved me on our first meeting. Even Marria admitted to me that Oma always said I was "special." I also had a good talk with Bob about work. He actually understood and respected my communications and writing work at CPR.

### **March 9**

Went off the compound with Fred and Marria. She was in good spirits and she was able to sit up front beside the driver in a padded seat and practice her Spanish. Finally a chance to see some of the countryside I was taken through in the dark. The vehicle was an open-backed bus-wagon that bumped along the pot-holed streets. Driving Dominican Republic-style seems to mean careening along the roads, jostling for right-of-way between cars, trucks, tourist buses, motorcycles, labourers' trucks. So much honking. No one paid any attention to stop signs; speed bumps being the only form of traffic control.

We began our excursion by picking up fellow tourists from the other resorts. These resorts are huge, resembling plantations. Labour-intensive. Buildings large and industrial-looking. Maybe Marria was on to something with her constant stream-of-consciousness reminiscing over the factories in Spain. These resorts are painted plantation mansions with grounds as cropped, tended and harvested as sugar cane plantations.

I could see Spanish influence in the spare formal hacienda style down to the gardens and placement of the palm trees. These trees are often uprooted and transplanted to make the beach more aesthetically pleasing. People work the grounds like share-croppers; planting, watering, painting. Huge gates with security as tight as Checkpoint Charlie. Meanwhile just outside the gates I can see groups of men lurking on every inch of the hinterland outside the resort perimeters. This is the first place where I haven't felt free to venture outside the boundaries. Any time I stepped past the gates felt dangerous – and illicit.

Here the tourists are commodities. Every lobster-coloured Northerner is part of a cargo shipment. The numbered bracelets make it explicit. So do the children. Everywhere we went, children ran to the roadsides to wave. They ran behind our bus, the bolder ones trying to jump on board. It felt a little like being on a state visit, on a motorcade. Many of the children ran and dance with their hands out, shouting, "Money! Money!" But tourism provides a livelihood and a way out of poverty. "I was always good in languages," said Felipe, our tour guide. "Spanish, English, some German and Italian. I got to school so I could get a good job in tourism."

Tiny houses, many painted pink and green, turquoise and white, all open to the breeze, some people already lying on front porches for coolness. Everywhere, groups of idle men. Children everywhere, just like the dogs on the beach. Garbage dumped wherever. We paused at a small school in a village (Béton?). I was struck by the assumptions of what a busload of tourists would want to see. Little was said about the village, except for this pause at the school. It was Saturday so it wasn't open. This may have been just as well as Marria would have become very excited. Felipe told us the illiteracy rate is very high and the biggest problem is getting the people to see any reason to go to school. "Needs are simple," he said. "You raise fruit, chickens, cattle. No need for heating costs or to prepare for winter. This is winter in the Dominican Republic. Summers are so hot and humid, work ceases. The days are all the same so why not mañana?"

I was fascinated by the little houses, the use of space, how they seem so comfortable, the space no more of less than what is needed. Cabanas, often constructed from the bark of Royal Palm trees. All open to the breeze. No separation between internal and external, private and public. Shutters slatted like Venetian blinds, doors divided so the top parts can open and shut independently.



Felipe gave us a tour of a typical farmhouse. Inside, the furniture was European, lacquered mahogany tables, chairs, bed frame, extra chairs stacked against a wall. Family photos, lots of first communion shots, lined the cabinets along with some religious artifacts. The DR is officially 95% Catholic. A ghetto blaster took pride of place in the bedroom. Behind the kitchen was another area, which led to a barn where chickens roamed. As economical and skilled use of available space as a ship.

Stopped at a sugar cane plantation. Acres of tough grasses that stood way over my head. More kids running after us. We reached a clearing and stopped near some teams of oxen wearing thick wooden yokes with bells. Men were cutting down the stalks with machetes, bandanas tied over their heads. Boys on donkeys. Felipe told us that a million labourers come in from Haiti every year to work on these plantations. In theory, they return to Haiti when the season is over but in reality the DR is full of Haitians who have simply stayed on. “Very bad political situation there,” Felipe said. Obviously this is a common tourist stop, industry on display. vendors arrived, selling hats woven from sugar cane leaves.

The bus continued through a more mountainous area. No fruit trees here. Some long-horned cattle but little else. We went into the mountains, steaming cones like volcanos, a little like Mont-Royal but a conical ridge and more dangerous looking. I felt very far from the beach. The bus started climbing. A few shacks, more hard-scrabble than any we saw in the village. Eventually we descended and the landscape changed again. We must have crossed at least three geographic or climatic regions today. We eased into jungle. The scrub became lush. I learned that bananas hang upwards from trees, coffee bean flowers on trees, as well, like dogwood blossoms. Cocoa beans grown in coconut-like shells that sprout from the trunks of trees. We stopped at a fruit farm where we tasted fruit in its natural state, without preservatives. Wow! I especially liked the papaya and it was as if I had never tasted pineapple before. Felipe warned us not to eat too much of the fruit; we are not used to the real thing.

After the fruit farm we entered range country, cowboys on horseback, cattle drives, those mountains smouldering in the distance. Another beach for a swim. Rum and Coke on the way back. Great people on the tour, including two friendly couples from Alberta, making the voyage that much more fun. We passed through another village where the houses were more run-down and the roads were dirt. Yellow and green election posters everywhere.

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Returned just in time for another session at the open bar and more “blanco.” Another good talk with Bob and Kathy. Eric stayed up with us this time. Bob is extremely angry at his mother, Marria and said she used to tie them to the bed as kids. The word “sociopath” came up, from Kathy, I think. Bob mentioned child abuse. Eric held his palms out and said, “Whoa, let’s not put this down as child abuse. Times were different then.” Eric, the eldest of the three brothers, is an excellent mediator, conciliator. We all walked along the beach and I felt so happy we had come and could clear the air with Bob and Kathy and discover I like them as people.

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During the last two days of our stay, Fred and I both started noticing cracks in Paradise. At first the whole place bustled with activity. Young men picked up trash, glasses, straightened the chairs and rearranged them in aesthetically pleasing rows. Someone would go into the bathrooms and decorate the taps with tissue folded to look like wings. Yet the latches didn’t work, the cubicle doors didn’t always close and toilet rims could be completely missing, depending on where you were. It almost seemed as if the change occurred during our time outside the compound. More and more men loitering at Checkpoint Charlie, more men and vehicles cruising just outside the barbed wire fence. Security guards not at their posts, employees not working on the grounds, more police ATVs cruising the beach, leaving tracks in the sand. This gave me a sense of how fragile this paradise really is.

Re-visited the flea market, this time with Bob, Kathy, their kids and Fred. I enjoyed roaming through the back alleys of the market to look at the paintings. Every one of these stalls has a back section of paintings called a “galleria,” but of course they do everything in their power to get you to buy. I could hear the call of Frank Cheapie-Cheap again. “You Canadians? I like Canada.” One vendor even sported a “Canada” fanny pack. I found the gallerias fascinating. The paintings were just stacked or propped up, terrible renditions of clowns alongside really sophisticated works of art. Some of the paintings were gorgeous, hypnotically powerful in their colours, shapes, repetitive patterns. One canvas depicted labourers tilling, bent backs becoming round shapes in blazing yellow, deep green, black dots of faces, conveying the hypnotic rhythm of work and also the darkness that lies behind such intensity of colour.

I was also beguiled by a different style, painted by several artists. This style was delicate, fanciful in a palette of pale pinks, blues, greens. I couldn’t tear myself away from one of these paintings. At first its delicate style seemed oddly dissonant with the lushness of the DR, but the more I looked the more connection I could make. The island was fragile, on the verge of drifting into space, barely existing at all, anchored only by the lightest of lines, a hint of presence. When I looked closer I could see tiny elongated human figures, women curved like herons or slender fruit trees, merging with nature. While looking at the paintings I forgot all about the hucksters and they didn’t bother me. I felt as if I had glimpsed something special. I have no way of describing how that painting affected me.

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Every day the relentless “are we having fun yet” pounding beat. People exercising on the beach, a mechanical mass motion, raising and lowering of arms and legs. For me sitting on a beach chair in the sun to get a tan is hard work. This is really not for me. I wanted to walk along the coast. Running afoul of the bureaucracy. Where do I start? It became a joke. Security guards everywhere I wandered. I left the compound to walk along the dunes and the police were following on ATVs and a helicopter hovered overhead. I loved seeing this part of the world and experiencing my first “all-inclusive.” I loved the bus tour and only wish I had taken the tour to Santo Domingo by myself, as no one else was interested.

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The Dominican Republic airport. The long slow pulse of heat, the humidity, like a yoke on my neck and shoulders, poaching my skin. I know I am returning to that legendary country of ice and snow and changed into long pants and real shoes, packed the beach-runners into the suitcase. I was sleepy and couldn't figure out if I'm fond of Marria or if she just downright disturbs me. I eventually unstuck myself from the chair and moved along with the sluggish tide toward the customs gates, everyone plucking sleeved clothing, jackets out of suitcases, replacing sandals with shoes and socks. A group of fifty cut in front of me but I didn't care, too much energy and I was melting in the heat and sweat, arms itching with the inevitable heat rash. I finally reached the first check-in counter.

Bob and Kathy didn't have the fifty dollars US (10 dollars per person) to pay the airport tax. We drummed up the Canadian equivalent and the official claimed he had never seen Canadian money before, even though three plane loads of tourists arrive at this airport every day of the week and oddly enough, he just happened to know the exact exchange rate. He eventually took our alien money.

Everyone proceeded through Customs except me. I was detained and a Customs guy, dressed in a dull green uniform, went through my entire backpack. He was puzzled by my train key ring. Then he picked out the two CPR paperweights in my bag. I had completely forgotten they were in there; they had not been caught in Calgary or Toronto. The guy held the paperweights up, stared at them, ran his fingers along the embossed train, the lettering "Canadian Pacific Railway." He tried placing them together to see if they were magnets. He turned them over and fingered the felt patches on the bottom. I was really starting to sweat. I kept flashing my tourist bracelet. See, I'm Number 4634.

Another man approached, dressed in camouflage and I glanced longly at the Chosen People on the other side of the River Jordan. Finally the Customs guy said something in Spanish that sounded like it might be the word for "souvenir." I nodded and smiled, repeated the word "souvenir." He finally nodded as if he had solved a mystery, repeated the word and placed the paperweights very delicately in two separate pouches in my backpack. Finally he ushered me through to the other side.

I entered another waiting room at my gate, the heat beating down from the pitched roof until finally I was climbing the ladder into the giant Transat, taking a last look around, feeling the salty wind curling my hair, knowing this would likely be the first and last time I'd ever have curly hair.

To Montréal.

### **March 11**

Beginning of my historical research trip in Montréal. Spent the night at Marria's house in Beaconsfield. It is a lovely house, all one level just as she wanted. I love the light and flow of it. Marria's conversation is free-fall, it goes from fixating on gas prices to her life in Barcelona without any transition. I think I understand her better now, her deracination, how she's Dutch but can't feel Dutch because she never really went to school there. I sometimes wonder if this is the reason for her lack of empathy and tremendous need for control. Oma once told Bob she was a "crooked tree," but I think the mockery and bluster go hand in hand with an inferiority complex. If I'm patient enough to withstand the static she can sometimes be lucid and interesting. Her love of Spain, especially Barcelona, is genuine. She lived there from ages four to eighteen (I think).

Although she didn't really understand why I was staying in town, rather than at her house in Beaconsfield, Marria drove Fred and me downtown to my B&B, the Grove on Coursol. It was a gorgeous house in Little Burgundy, close to the area where I was planning to research. Charming little suite in the basement with its own entry. I found out from Geraldine Mickie, the owner, that it is all Grand Trunk railway housing along Coursol, built around 1886. Not only that, but her father worked all his life with the CPR as an investigator. I couldn't have chosen a better place.

As soon as Marria and Fred left (he was staying with her to help around the house), I went for a walk to get reacquainted with Montréal. Strolled past the tall three-storey houses that turned to brick row-housing similar to the Smiths Falls railway district. Weather merciful, above zero, not nearly as bad a transition from the Dominican Republic as it could have been. Up Atwater and down Ste-Catherine. The area looked revitalized, not as grimy and rundown as last time.

The Forum has been transformed into a complex that looks very European with steel buttresses. A huge arts supplies store has moved into the area. Proceeded down St-Jacques toward the Queen Elizabeth Hotel, trying to put myself in IJ's shows, trying to see the buildings as they might have been around 1890. (IJ being my protagonist in the manuscript I am working on.)

Next morning at breakfast, Geraldine told me the change in the Atwater-Fort area is due to Champlain College. This led into a good talk about how much students do for a city. I met Jonas, a twenty year-old cat who falls asleep standing up on the stairs and sometimes falls over. Also met Flash, a boxer who Geraldine rescued from death. He had been locked in an empty apartment and was bald, covered in hives and had survived only by drinking the toilet water. He is now thriving, very sweet, not an alpha dog. I loved them both so much.

Stopped in at the Atwater Library. I knew it had once been the Mechanics Institute and I've been using it as IJ's workplace before the railway entered her life. Glad I visited because my description has to be changed. The Mechanics Institute wasn't located on Atwater in that time period. It was on St James Street, in the middle of the financial district. In spite of its stated mission to educate and improve the state of the working classes, it was actually more a club for bankers, stockbrokers and other corporate subscribers. I also don't want to relocate my character there as it would mean she'd be familiar with Montréal's financial district and Capitalists in general. IJ needs to discover this world in an immediate way as an outsider, as a parallel to Calgary 1996.

Inside, the library is great. It doesn't look like it has changed since the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Books crowded as tenements on dark wood shelves you can only reach by climbing up a rickety metal staircase, ceiling so low I instinctively ducked and hunched. A sign on the washroom door posted the library's rules including, "The reading rooms of the library are open to the public; however any person who exhibits offensive behaviour will be asked to leave."

At one point I had to broach the woman with the British accent at the circulation desk to admit I couldn't figure out how to access the catalogue from the computer screen. She looked at me as if I were the proverbial space alien and took me to the wall of catalogue card drawers in the corner and I felt obliged to listen patiently as she pulled out one of the drawers to explain how to match a card with the books on the shelves. I might have been embarrassed but this is gold for the manuscript!

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Met Fred at Entre Nous, located in a hidden courtyard on rue Stanley, where Julian cut my hair. After that, we met with Fred's family's financial analyst, Richard La Pointe, on the thirtieth floor of Place de la Cathédrale. Everywhere people in cubicles, ears glued to phones, monitors flickering with Dow Jones readings, It was fascinating but terrible. I didn't like M La Pointe and resolved to find a more down-to-earth advisor in Calgary. We recovered from this appointment by having pizza at Amelio's.

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Next day, McGill. The familiar keyboard-playing busker was at Lionel-Groulx. Black people everywhere, many in beautiful African-style clothing. What a luxury, knowing I can be out in a city, roam wherever I like day or night knowing a Métro or bus is always running. The really bad busker is still sing-shouting "When Irish Eyes are Smiling" in the Metcalfe corridor at Peel station. The only thing that has changed is his newly dyed hair. When I arrived on campus I felt disoriented, kept calling McLennan MacEwan. Faces kept appearing and I had a hard time remembering who they were and I could run into any number of people I know.

Good research day though. The material I found turned out to be a revelation of the D'oh variety. Basically, everything I feel about Montréal right now while walking the streets has to be completely reversed to convey my character at the turn pf the 20<sup>th</sup> century. This put me in an interesting state of mind, seeing Montréal in two dimensions at the same time.

– IJ Kroeger in 1900 would not be able to see the buildings the way I do now. The city was a boomtown then, growing so much it would be frightening, dislocating as country estates were built up. The buildings would be symbols of commerce and status, not imbued with humanistic European charm. The city would not be a refuge of individuality and lifestyle choice then. This was Capitalism Central in a colonialist country.

– The streets were black with grime and full of smoke. Nothing would be old enough to acquire any romantic patina. There would be a lot of ugly Victorian kitsch. There is nothing charming about some of those photos of downtown Montréal in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century.

– It would be difficult for IJ to move easily through the city. It was highly stratified, segregated according to class. As a white-collar worker in the red-hot railway industry, she would be dependent on a mailing address. She could not disappear into the working class areas, especially those that housed railway labourers. I can't situate her in a three-storey house on Coursol, for example. That is, unless I give her a false mailing address.

– No matter how sharp IJ's sense of social justice may be, she can't make a point by refurbishing an old house and live among the working classes. This would threaten her tenuous position. Also, these areas, like Griffintown, consisted of tenements and shanties and were rife with illness. Fires and floods were rampant. It would be dangerous for her to live there as a single woman.

– She would be scrambling to hold on to what she's got and would likely loathe this city that shows only two sides; the Golden Square Mile and the shanties of Griffintown.

– Must fix a date. Suburbanization was well underway; streetcars going out as far as Westmount. She wouldn't likely be able to walk to work, even at this time. White-collar employees were all moving up the hill to be as close as possible to the elite.

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To the McCord Museum to see the *Simply Montréal* exhibit. Museums have changed over the years and so much for the better. This is an intimate, informal collection, impressionistic and intuitive in its organization. I could get a feel for the kind of history I'm looking for because it revealed the small things I need to bring IJ's world to life.



The exhibit opens with Montréal winters and I could happily travel through decades united by winter. See how things have and haven't changed. The exhibit was especially interesting in its treatment of the Golden Square Mile. One wall was covered by a photo mural of a labourer's shack in Griffintown. This was juxtaposed with smaller photos of mansions. While my eyes moved from one wall to the other I could pick up earphones to listen to an excerpt from Gabrielle Roy's *The Tin Flute*. This juxtaposition was worth a thousand words. Someone showed mastery in conveying a point-of-view; shaping history.

Wandered through the exhibit taking random notes on small things, details that were starting to coalesce.

- Streetcars and telephone poles along Ste-Catherine in 1901. Streetcar snow ploughs; a street sweeper tram. Huge snowbanks, fire hydrants. All the children's sleighs in the street. During the flood of 1888 people had rowboats out on McGill and St Paul streets. Chaboillez Square flooded.

- "Ronayne Bros. Boots & Shoes. Wholesale & Retail." "I.A. Beauvais. Merchant Taylor."

- Rue St-Paul looked like a scene from the French Revolutions, from *Joyless Street*. Block after block of grim stone.

- "A.R. Flanders. Hat & Bonnet. Bleachery."

- Prosperous citizens played cricket, golf, polo. They followed the hunt. "Say Jeeves, bring me my equerry. Why is an equerry never around when you most need one."

- Working class strong man competitions and arm-wrestling tournaments.

- Royal Montreal Golf Club on Fletcher's Field.

- Montréal's first manufacturing company was "Forges du St-Maurice" near Trois-Rivières, opened in 1740. It produced stoves.

- The latest style up the hill, purple silk dress with detachable collar and yoke piece. I could long for a pair of pointy black evening shoes with sequins. Maybe she could eke out a living being an anonymous writer of ballroom comedies.

– What IJ might see on St James Street. Men everywhere, and hats, top hats and bowlers. Telephone poles, streetcars, row upon row of stone. Columns, entablatures, les mascarons. “To Let” signs. Women looking sharp in ties over white blouses. Hat styles so large you can barely get past them in the streets. Wires everywhere, joining building to building, pole to pole, intersecting over the streets. Spark of a passing streetcar.

– The Balmoral Station typewriters could be top-of-the-line from Syracuse; Smith Premier Typewriter No 4.

– The era of large retail department stores; Morgan’s Colonial House, Dupuis et Frères, Ogilvy’s. (Morgan’s was bought by the Bay in 1960 and the name wasn’t changed until 1971.)

– Model trains, stereoscopic viewers, big dolls with bisque heads, pocket watches all popular.

– Ad for shoe store, emphasizing the modern age: “1780. 2 Pairs a Day. The Old Style. 1880. 300 Pairs a Day. The New Style.”

– Downtown garment factories humming. East end spinning mills and shoe factories. Rumble of huge metal foundries echo throughout the west part of the island.

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Another day of walking and trying to get into the spirit of turn-of-the-century Montréal. I walked to the point where I became footsore, exhausted, a long way from Coursol, feeling somewhat lonely and homeless and finally I could make a start. I was finally able to pull out this notebook and see the city through IJ’s eyes. As a woman, an impostor a capitalist who has lost her home because of her job. She has lost her home, her identity, her gender. I could finally reimagine this city, enough to begin pulling some of these notes together and adding some feeling and urgency. Transformation of the research.

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Right now you wish you could transport yourself back to the 1860s when the city felt like home. Everything looked so quiet and peaceful in the old photographs, snowbound vistas of St James Street, buildings as symmetrical as Apollonian temples with only a few streetlamps to break your stride. The photographs make the city look so clean and orderly, so easy to enter. Streets empty of people.

You've been on your feet all day, stumbling around the telegraph poles and fire hydrants, weaving past iron boxes of streetcars, almost clobbered by one marked "Centre Street." Block after block of stone rectangles affixed to each other, leaving no breathing space, growing high enough to take over the sky. The Stock Exchange looms over the columns of the Bank of Montreal, the Mechanics Institute with the Revelation Cigars advertisement inscribed on its side. And the wires are sizzling with electricity, criss-crossing in the air, joining buildings, some dropping over the street like snakes.

Continue walking, endless walking. Look up at all the "To Let" signs. Notice all the women on the streets, you can barely slip past their hats, the style is so large this season. They look like crushed cushions on their heads but the new white blouses and long neck ties look very sharp. You'll never be able to get over wanting to wear feminine (real) clothes again. You peer into the windows of Morgan's Colonist House, a department store large enough to be the Palace of Versailles. You could walk in and buy a waistcoat, a pocket watch, a stereoscopic viewer, deck yourself out as an Irish paddy for the next CPR party. You could even pick up a Greek urn or a model train set. Golf clubs, hunting horns.

No matter how delectable, avoid on pain of death the silk dresses with detachable collar-and-yoke pieces. Pass without even looking at, much less naming, the big dolls with bisque heads and moveable arms. Morgan's can't help. There is nothing you can buy that can help you belong or even navigate through this city where everyone, but you, has a place.

You can't get over the changes. The old Conquest fortifications are long gone, replaced by the shipyards. Entire blocks of the city have burnt to the ground. Stores and shops and country houses are replacing cloisters and churches. Maisonneuve still guards the parish church of Notre-Dame, holding the Place d'Armes against the Iroquois, but the Bank of Montreal has conquered them all; tolerates their existence like you might an Old Country grandmother. The streets of the saints are now the addresses of stock brokers.

With the help of the Montreal Fire Brigade, Christ Church has moved to St Catherine Street. Houses of God can apparently be relocated at whim. The Virgin on the roof still speaks to sailors but in a voice punctuated by the hydrographic charts of Trinity House and the navigation marks of the Province of Canada. Meanwhile in the Old Town below, only a few old Rip Van Winkles linger on, leaning over counters, blowing dust off their spectacles and fumbling over empty tills.

In old photographs St Catherine Street could hardly be called a street at all. It was a pleasant country road, a lane with modest two-story houses with attics, a bit of garden in front or behind. Now shops jostle the houses, counting houses on the best corners, old manors plastered with false fronts, lower stories gutted into bigger shop floor space. Even here in Capitalist Central, you can still hear people reminisce about the old days, going on about the currency change, how they understood pounds, shillings and pence, how dollars and cents are incomprehensible and a Republican plot – and this change occurred back in 1862!

The more the city changes the more stratified it becomes. The faubourgs are now part of the town. Craig Street and St Lawrence Main are all built up but none of this helps you. You need a respectable address. No one lives near their workplaces any more. With steam, electric cars, trams, omnibuses you don't have to walk to work any more. And the more the city grows the longer the boundaries until they're deep as trenches now and you can't cross a street without knowing you're in a retailing, finance, government or wholesale district, and who you are is where you live. Which brings you right back to the problem. You need a mailing address that won't arouse suspicion at CPR.

Anywhere near the Lachine Canal is out of the question and so is St Ann, especially now that it has turned into Griffintown. This is the infamous area west of McGill Street, between the railway and the new canal, full of Irish navvies. Peppered throughout this area is railway housing you must avoid like the Bubonic Plague, for not only can you not have the address of a track worker, it's also the wrong railway. Your colleagues at CPR all seem to congregate in Cote St Antoine, St Laurent or St Jacques if they're French. Everyone is moving up the mountain, hovering as near the Square Mile as possible. If you don't join them they will perceive you as not being a contender.

Say you do purchase a "maisonnette" in St Antoine. What if you open the door as Isabel Kroeger and your neighbour who works at Balmoral Station recognizes you? At best you'd be branded as a pervert. You couldn't take a walk down the street without first donning a beard and men's casual attire as if preparing for a hunt or a golf game. This means you would have to live in this maison as IJ Kroeger. Full-time. Decorate it in dark wood panelling, fill it with mammoth pieces of furniture, display guns and sports trophies and golf clubs and hollowed-out books and portraits of distinguished ancestors, cigars and brandy always at hand. If only you could disappear into the city below the mountain, start all over again among the immigrants, the cheering throngs in the dance halls and brothels, the cock-fighting rings, Strong Man competitions and arm-wrestling tournaments of Notre Dame and Griffintown. But that is even more impossible.

You make your way back down to the Bank of Montreal and sit on the wide steps, head buried in your hands, trying not to cry and provoke some malevolent do-gooder into summoning a hospital waggon to pick you up. If the company doesn't expose you, the city itself will spit you out and the CPR is a million dollar spit in the ocean. Somewhere in this vast Dominion there must be a place to hide, where you can be yourself, start over. There is no future for you here. Even if your pockets are lined with money, what cold comfort can that bring if you can't even recognize yourself, and, oh gracious, you're sobbing and instead of being in a confessional you're on the steps of a bank. Sign of the times, you suppose.

I can hear Isabel/IJ Kroeger's voice coursing through me and think I can turn these Montréal notes into a story. This research trip has succeeded so far beyond my expectations.

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Snowstorm in Montréal, four hour delay in flight back to Calgary. I have seen more than I would ever want to of the Dorval Airport.

## **March 22**

Meanwhile back in Calgary – another CPR wake, arranged by Dave Lockwood and held at Buzzards. This one in honour of Ian La Couvée. People who have left CPR since my recent departure: Colleen Donahue, Vaughan Wallace (Barb K's hand-picked boy wonder. He didn't last long). Debbie-Lyne Guerin and now Ian. Everyone was at this party, including Colleen, Vaughan, Debbie-Lyne, Isabel and Ian Martin, who had left ages ago. Most of the dept was there (except for those Dave did not invite) and it felt like Homecoming week.

As soon as I entered the room Larry came up to me and said I had to sit at the Quitters' Table. His little joke made me realize there was no ice to break. Dave Jones greeted me warmly, beer in one hand, slim cigar in the other. I mentioned the research trip to Montréal and the novel and he seemed genuinely interested. Spoke with Colleen Donahue. She's on her own now, working as a consultant and much happier.

Although I have a cold, everyone kept telling me how great I looked. That may have to do with the tan and curl in my hair from Punta Cana. Someone said it was obvious I was thriving without CPR. Peta asked if she had to leave the company to look as good as I did. Hard to reconcile how much I really like these people with my misery in the company and department through the last year.

Good talk with Judy and her partner, Tony. When they heard about my research trip they told me stories about their old days in Montréal, the old working class area of Rosemont. Tony first met Judy when she worked in a floral shop. He wants me to finish "that damn book ASAP" because he wants to read it. Said he was my biggest fan and would flip through The CPR News for my name and if he didn't see it would just toss the paper aside.

Peta loved my brochure about the novel. I was describing what a visual dog it is, then pulled out a copy to show her. She said the words were all there and the graphics quality didn't matter. She also said there hasn't been a drop of creativity since I left and asked me for a copy of the brochure.

Talk with Vaughan. He hated the company and even though he hadn't been there very long he described his decision to quit as one of the best he's ever made in his life. Darren Paquin came up to me and thanked me for all the kind words I had said to him at my wake. He said they meant so much to him and I was an inspiration to him! The evening ended when one of the new people in the department, Leah(?), came over to say hello and that she had heard such great things about me. Wow! Who knew? Taxi home for old times sake with Debbie-Lyne and Jennifer. I feel as if I finally have closure with the CPR, and all the respect and kind words are a real wind at my back. Onward!

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